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Crosby, THE SELFHOOD OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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or authored by Ninian Smart.

Though not all the essays flow smoothly from one to the next, the editor, John P. Burris, has assembled a coherent collection that represents the scholarly concerns of Ninian Smart over the past ten years, informed by several decades of experience and reflection. Smart, a pioneer in the discipline of religious studies, reminds us in this volume of the enormous complexity of the study of religion, a discipline that integrates philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, and political thought.

The Selfhood of the Human Person, by **John F. Crosby**. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996. Pp. x and 313. $19.95.

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Philosophers seldom make headlines. When they do the news is not always encouraging, as with Peter Singer's bid to rehabilitate infanticide. Karol Wojtyla, of course, is an exception. As John Paul II his recent *Fides et Ratio* won plaudits even in fora resolutely ignorant of philosophical inquiry.

Celebrity opens many a door. But Wojtyla's message merits its reception. It speaks hope—and, thus, courage. "It is the nature of the human being," he argues, "to seek the truth" and especially "the truth of the person—what the person is and what the person reveals from deep within." (#32)

John Crosby, of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, begins his study of the person with an acknowledgement. "This work was born of my encounter with the personalism of Karol Wojtyla in the early 1980s." (ix) (He cites Wojtyla's *The Acting Person* and the essays available, thanks to Theresa Sandok, under the title *Person and Community*.) Crosby explores, as does Wojtyla, classical Thomist themes in a phenomenological mode. Wojtyla's phenomenology engages the legacy of Max Scheler. Crosby's mentor—in substance *and* method—is Dietrich von Hildebrand. As a (dissenting) student of Husserl, von Hildebrand essayed a phenomenological realism premised on an intentionality that achieves a direct contact with being.

A straight-ahead approach to Crosby's book seems best. First I will sketch the central themes he so carefully examines. Then I identify a pair of problems which he must face more squarely than he so far has. His book, I think, is extraordinary. If there be any justice, others will go well beyond my brief comments.

How is it, to begin, that we can speak of a "self," a self that we discover in consciousness? We can do so, Crosby observes, by reflecting on our *moral* consciousness. Paradigm cases of depersonalization, for example, slavery and prostitution, point to a subject conscious of a self if only in its very resisting of objectification.

An objectification of the self, in effect, alienates the self to another. Yet there is an incommunicability central to the self of moral consciousness. (While every individual has an incommunicability, e.g., your copy of today's paper is not mine, incommunicability becomes stronger—and axiologically

decisive—as we "ascend" the ladder of being.) In the language of Richard of St. Victor, the *individua existentia* of the person is *incommunicabilis*, an incommunicable existence of a (Boethian) rational nature. Each of us, Crosby finds, has "an essential something that would be forever lost to the world...if the person embodying it were to go out of existence altogether." (65)

Subjectivity is a mark of the incommunicable. Our self-presence calls us to explore the person not simply in terms of, say, potency and act but phenomenologically, through the inward dimensions of reason and volition. Doing so, we can distinguish between a recollected and a forfeit subjectivity. In the former I realize, in the midst of my "projects," that "even now, in the present moment...I am a self, an unrepeatable self, and do not become one by means of completing them." (103) In the latter, a kind of "bad transcendence," I jeopardize my selfhood. By allowing my consciousness to be "dispersed," whether in things or other persons, I forfeit my subjectivity. (106-107)

For Crosby, however, subjectivity cannot exhaust the self. Rather one's experience of self points to substantiality. The phenomena of dispersed and defective forms of self-presence testify to a substantial reality whose subjective expression is imperfectly integrated. My subjectivity is no more the measure of who I am than my perception is the measure of its objects (here Crosby recalls Plato's reply to Protagoras).

Indeed, Crosby argues for the constructive interplay of substance, subjectivity, and objectivity. Each of us, in the light of incommunicability, recognizes the truth of his or her person. Yet an authentic transcendence calls us to turn to self and to others and even to the infinite *as objects*. David, he reminds us, cannot see himself without recognizing himself as the object of Nathan's parable—and its judgment "That man is you." The point is clear: "the truth about myself...presents itself first of all to other persons, who reflect it back to me." (160) But there is also a horizon for the reciprocity between self and other, and the horizon is without limits. Crosby affirms a transcendence toward "a certain infinity in virtue of which we are world-open subjects ..." (167)

The dialectic of subject and object, before the horizon of the infinite, finds a parallel in the self's relation to the good. If I am open only to the pleasant or to the *bonum* of eudaemonism, I diminish myself. I find the truth about myself only if I become open to an independent "world of value." (183) Only the person has a capacity for this value-response. It is in such a response, too, that one can again find an irreducible personal substance. (Crosby cites a passage from Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*. Speaking to Norfolk, Thomas More says "I will not give in because I oppose it—I do—not my pride, not my spleen, nor any other of my appetites but *I* do—*I*!" (190))

Crosby also appeals to the ontological core of the person in distinguishing between technical value and moral value. The former depends on a self-possession that is only partly under one's control. A leader, say, needs certain qualities—some of which are a psychological endowment. Yet a leader, however rich in these qualities, might lead for good or ill. The moral value of the person—as leader—will be decisive. *This* value is rooted in freedom. But only a being able to transcend self and to participate in the world of

value has such freedom. Such, indeed, is the being of personal substance.

What is the truth of the human person? As revealed both in immanence and transcendence, Crosby sees our personhood as that which images God. Here theonomy overcomes both autonomy and heteronomy: "each human person is *measured* by God." (288) In the end, we fully learn the truth about ourselves in the presence of God. "To believe that I am known by God...called by name... [becomes] an overwhelming experience of personal selfhood." (301)

Though I am among the keenest of Crosby's readers, I do want to raise a pair of problems for him. First, he pays too little attention to human bodiliness. Second, his appeal to moral consciousness in what Karol Wojtyla calls "a culture of death" (*Evangelium Vitae* #12) is too optimistic.

On the question of bodiliness. Crosby is quick to fault Aquinas for teaching that the separated soul is not a person. (18n) But if we speak of *human* persons, how could Aquinas say otherwise? Absent the body, one is not a human at all. While rejecting hylomorphism, Crosby contests dualism by arguing that "person and nature form one being in man," adding that an account of what this means brings us to "the embodiment of persons." (263) He needs to press ahead with this account and, in doing so, engage David Braine's fine analysis of embodiment in his *The Human Person: Animal & Spirit*.

On the matter of optimism. Crosby says that in facing depersonalization we become sensitive to the self and its dignity. He offers, as an example, how we recoil from the practice of prostitution. But do we? Many think it should be legal, that its critics slight the value of freedom. Another example must surely haunt Crosby. It is a commonplace to suppose that a woman's subjectivity, and moral consciousness, show that she is a person—and the absence of both shows that her unborn child is not. Here, perhaps, Crosby might simply note that philosophy has limits. Still, one hopes for more, however evil the times.